

THE LIFE OF AN ALTAR BOY

Westby has always been blessed with having an altar server. In the last couple of years Matthew McGiven has been consistent in being there for most Sundays but as Matthew moves on to pastures knew a new generation of altar servers have come through.



Matthew was trained by the best, Alan Pugh who sadly had to retire from the position a couple of years ago. When thinking of what to write for this month, I asked Alan if he could put a few words together as to his life as an altar boy and he didn't disappoint.....

"I started serving Mass at the age of seven. At my parish, there was a waiting list to get onto the altar! Nowadays you have to hope and pray that some young person will be interested enough to serve. We kids always considered it an honour to go on the altar. I think at the time there were about fifteen servers with ages ranging from seven to the late teens.

There were four Sunday masses and never a shortage of servers. At Benediction on Sundays evenings the altar was swarming with servers. There was always a fight for the Thurible. I was swinging it with great gusto the first time I did it and kept banging it on the altar step because I was so small. For some reason I never got to do it again for some time! I can still see the dents in that beautiful brass Thurible. Maybe I was a glutton for punishment or I just liked serving Mass, but I served at the seven thirty morning Mass every day until I went to study for the Priesthood at the age of thirteen. At college we were on serving duty every four weeks.

When I went into the RAF at 17, I was fortunate enough to be able to come home at weekends so was able to serve the Sunday morning Mass. I was senior server at my parish for 10 years before I got married. One great occasion I will never forget was the consecration of our new church. Archbishop Heenan (soon to become Cardinal Heenan) officiated. The altar was packed with fifty priests and I had fifteen servers on, all resplendent in red cassocks. They performed wonderfully. At the reception after the ceremony, to which I was invited, the Archbishop congratulated me on the conduct of the servers and said he wished he had them at his Cathedral in Liverpool.

After I got married, we moved to another parish, but I was still able to serve when they were short of servers. This was about the time of the second Vatican Council and soon after would see the steady decline of boys wanting to serve Mass. I have never been able to understand the change in attitude of a boy wanting to serve Mass. Of course,

until Vatican Two, the mass was celebrated in Latin, and servers had to learn all the responses in Latin. Also, the server had much more to do on the altar in assisting the priest. So possibly serving at the new Mass, with very little to do could be a reason.

Until Fr Cooper came to St Anne's I was only able to serve when the chance came along. I have had some wonderful years serving at St Anne's assisting David Done (may he rest in peace) and the priests we have been lucky to have. My one regret that because of health problems I had to retire two years ago. My ambition was always to be carried off the altar in my cotta and cassock!

Around 1955 I was camping in the Langdale Valley in the Lakes. The nearest church was in Ambleside, a good twelve miles walk away. One Sunday, I was walking in a torrential downpour, absolutely sodden. From the distance, I could hear a car grinding up the hill. I climbed up the bank to let it pass and the car pulled up at the side of me. The passenger window went down, and a voice asked me would I like a lift. I slid down the bank and looked into the car, and said, "I would appreciate a lift but I'm wet through" "Never mind, it's all plastic' came the reply. So, I got in and saw the driver was wearing a Roman Collar. I introduced myself and told him I was going to Ambleside to Mass. "That's a coincidence" he said "That's where I'm going and I'm saying the Mass. Do you serve because I haven't got a server?" So, I found myself serving Mass in my stocking feet and wet sodden clothes. After Mass Father asked me if I would serve at the Glenridding Hotel in Glenridding. I was glad I did, because we got a full English breakfast after Mass. God moves in mysterious ways as the priest's name was Turner, one of Canon Aidan's distant relations. I have got many happy memories of my years on the altar and will always be thankful for the great honour and privilege.

The new servers are Carys, Carla, Georgina and Seb. We hope they will have many happy years as Alan did and find it a privilege and an honour.



Matthew, Georgina, Carys and Carla



Matthew, Father Kevin and Alan Pugh